 Dee School Oral History Project

**Date: May 25, 2018**

**Interviewee: Santiago “Jim” Sandoval**

**Interviewer: Richa Wilson**

**Transcriber: Michael Ballif**

RW: This is Richa Wilson of the Weber County Heritage Foundation. Today is May 25th, 2018, and I’m in the home of Santiago “Jim” Sandoval. We are going to talk about Dee School and his role there, as well as his recollections. Jim, thank you for being available to talk with me today. For the record, please tell me when you worked at Dee and what your role was.

JS: Okay. My sister Cathy was a teacher intern at Dee, so she had moved up to Ogden to go to Weber State in ‘72. I came up—I graduated college at University of Utah in 1973, so I came up approximately ‘74. I was going to be an attorney. I was a pre-law major at Weber State. She asked me to come and volunteer. She was teaching sixth grade. She was an intern and had a group of young men who were Spanish-speaking only, and she said “I struggle, I just can’t get to them. Would you mind volunteering?” So I went down. So my initial visit to Dee was to tutor, to work with these young people. That would have been in about ‘74. I enjoyed it so much. I had been accepted to the University of Utah law school and I changed my major and went into education. So I then became an intern at Dee School. I was a teacher intern at Dee from ‘75 to ‘76. It was a two-year program but I finished it a little early. And had a unique experience, because I got to teach with my sister one of the years. She and I team taught sixth grade.

RW: And how much older… I assume she’s older…

JS: I’m two years older than she is, and I tell people it’s not that I was a slow learner, I was in the army for 3 years. I may have been a slow learner, but I was in the army for 3 years. So, that was how I got involved. I honestly have to tell you that there are two reasons I did. One, because I thoroughly enjoyed working with these young people. I’ve spoken Spanish and English since I was a child, and I love speaking Spanish. But in my mind, probably the cement what kept that, what made Dee School unique in my opinion, based on my experience, was the principal. E. Milton Kendrick was his name. People knew him as Milt. And he was able to, number one, basically help design the school, to determine what the teaching setup would be, which is team teaching, etcetera, and the open area. And he was able to hire his teachers, which I can tell you based on my later career, having been a principal, that that’s pretty unique. And he basically was, not only a mentor, but just an outstanding human being, and I attribute much of what happened at Dee to, number one, his leadership. But even more importantly, allowing us to teach. Allowing us to team-teach. Allowing us to become . . . I’m gonna call it a family, we became a family, which is pretty unique.

RW: I’ve heard other people mention Mr. Kendrick and I've wondered about his role in the school’s design. I think you've touched on this. Do you think he was the person who came up with the idea, or was the idea out there and he was just a perfect match?

JS: To be honest with you, I couldn’t tell you that definitively, but I would say that he’s the reason the team-teaching, and the openness and the rest of it, I would attribute to him. And it was interesting, because walls, you know, most of us are used to walls. And I tell people that the students—it basically took them two weeks to get used to the openness, and some of the teaching staff is probably still in therapy. Because it was different. And I’ll say it this way, not meaning to embarrass anybody, people would ask me "How can you do that, how can you teach in that openness?" And I said, "As a male, I always felt that my zipper was down." You really are in the open. And people would say, "Well what would you do, weren’t there distractions?" And I said, "If somebody laughed, if a class laughed, I’d want to know what the joke was so we could also laugh, and then we’d go on with teaching." And the one unique thing about Dee is that we had visitors from throughout the world. We had Japanese visitors, we had people from Germany, we had just about every country I can think of that came to visit that setup.

RW: And did that visitation continue through the life of Dee?

JS: Yes. I was an intern and eventually I was hired to teach sixth grade, and that’s when Cathy and I got to teach together for one year – those poor kids didn’t have a chance. And then I became an administrative intern at Dee, and then became the principal at Dee. So it was pretty unique, I started as a volunteer, and then eventually became the principal.

RW: And what years did you serve as principal?

JS: I was principal in ‘77, and it was only one year, because they had a reduction in force. So I loved it, but they had a reduction and I was the last hired. Interestingly enough, I then went – it was interesting, because they went from the junior highs to middle school – and I followed some of those poor little guys up to the middle school. I was an assistant principal for three years. And then when they finished, I was sent to Ogden High School. So I spent ten years there. Some of those poor little buggers had me from the time they were in elementary school all the way through high school.

RW: You followed them around.

JS: They followed me around, that’s what I tell them. But like I said, Milt was a phenomenal human being.

RW: Do you know anything about his background or training?

JS: Other than the fact that, you know, he was a teacher, he was an educator, and he had, I believe, three children. He had one son who was disabled, and again we became a family, so… you weren’t just a staff member. You were a family member. Now, I’ll give you an example. I have a son who lives next door, he's got an apartment. Was born disabled, he’s in a wheelchair. Was born with spina bifida, has been confined. At about 6 or 9 months, he developed what they would call fluid on the brain. They didn’t expect him to live. And Milt asked if I minded having a prayer for him. And I said, "Only on one condition." Because I was born and raised Catholic, he was LDS, and I said, "Only on one condition." Prayer to me, it doesn’t matter what building you go to or what you declare yourself, I said prayer is prayer. I said, the only thing I ask, because he wanted to do it as a staff, that only staff members that *want* to do it participate. I don’t want anyone to feel they have to. My son is 41. They didn’t think he was going to make it. He’s 41 years old. My hat’s off to that gentleman, he’s a fantastic person.

RW: Are there other people that really stick out in your mind as memorable people?

JS: Phyllis Savage. She actually taught my daughter, my oldest daughter, in first grade. Alice Glenn. I say that for two reasons. Number one, you know when you’re asking “What about Dee,” and “What about the family?” and the rest of it? We used to have what’s called a sing-in. And when I called her – she had called and I hadn’t answered the phones, she left me a message. I called her and I started singing the Dee School song.

RW: Was that Phyllis, when she called you about this interview?

JS: Yes. And she goes, “Ah, you?!" And I said "Yes ma’am, I still remember it." And Alice, an African-American, she did the Martin Luther, the, we used to call it…

RW: The brotherhood…

JS: The brotherhood. So, the two of them. Alice taught second and Phyllis taught first, and Alice also taught my daughter. So, she probably had some of the finest teachers in the world. And just genuine human beings, and I attribute that, again, [to] Milt Kendrick was able to hire his staff. He sure did a good job picking them.

RW: And that is unusual, isn’t it?

JS: Yeah, generally, you go in as the principal, and you’re able to hire new staff, but you’re not able to select staff. So that was pretty unique. But those two, I mean, there were several. One other person that sticks in my mind, her name was Genevieve Morrison. She taught sixth grade, and was the “Pod Coordinator.” She oversaw that. It was interesting because when I did my student teaching, she became Utah’s Teacher of the Year. But one of the things that stands in my mind – because I’ve always been very culturally involved in the Hispanic community and in the ethnic minority community – she told the students just before Thanksgiving, “Tomorrow, when you come to school, you have to dress either as an Indian or as a pilgrim.” And I said, "Well, Gen, I won’t be here tomorrow." And she said, "Why not?" And I said, "I’m neither Native nor pilgrim, so thanks for the day off."

RW: How did that go over?

JS: Well, we gave her the nickname General Gen. Genevieve. She was tough, she was pretty tough.

RW: I’ve heard of these pods and the pod concept but didn’t realize there were pod coordinators. And what were their roles?

JS: Their role, basically... for example, we had the fifth and sixth grade pod, so we had – so we team-taught. For example, I, as the sixth-grade teacher, I taught the lowest achievers at math, and the mid-range in readers. We would – because one of the unique things about Dee School is transiency – I always told my staff, both as a teacher and as a principal, do not throw records away because there's a very good chance they’re going to come back. And honestly, because of socio-economic, etc., some of them were just ahead of the landlord. So they would move, then eventually come back. And again, because of the neighborhood, number one, it was less expensive to live there than in other places.

But those are probably three of the ones that stick out most in my mind. But the unique thing about Gen – I was a student teacher, I did an internship under her, I was a student teacher under her, and later became her principal. For example, I was the sixth grade pod leader. I was responsible for sixth grade, and we had Cathy, who was one of my team members, and then we had a teacher for special ed. We had 61 students between the three of us.

RW: Is Genevieve still alive?

JS: No, she’s been deceased quite some time. So of the two that I mentioned, obviously Phyllis and Alice Glenn are still alive. Matter of fact, I think Alice still taught last year. I swear, she’s… I don’t know how old she is, but she’s been teaching a long time.

RW: A long time. Like Phyllis, who’s stayed involved too.

JS: Yes, because my daughter should be 45 in September and had her in second grade, so she would have been seven? She’s taught a lot of years, and she taught before that.

RW: Can you tell me a little bit more of your impressions of the space itself, and the architecture, the physical environment?

JS: I loved it, to be honest with you, because I think that it is the way society is, that is, it's open. Even though people like walls. There was an art room downstairs. There was a music room downstairs where you literally could take students and do some things like that. But it was unique, and what was interesting is some of my colleagues would try to put a portable board up as a wall, or a bookcase as a wall. And Milt would come and move it.

RW: Really?

JS: And he generally did it once without telling you. I never did it because I watched him. And it was interesting, Cathy and I were in sixth grade, we were in the Pluto pod, because they were all named after planets, and kindergarten was right next to us. So you talk about the unique arrangement. But it was in a circle, and if you were not familiar, you’d get lost. Like if you were a visitor and they said – what I used to tell people – find out where your child is and what pod they're in, or what planet they’re in, and that’s where you’ll go, because it's a circle and you’ll get lost. There are two staircases, some people call it the front and the back, some people that even confuses them more. So it was a circle.

RW: So were there graphic symbols, like, photos of planets to identify places?

JS: Yes. As a matter of fact, because in your pod, which is open, then you also had a large ceiling area. So you actually had a whole in the roof that I would call. So, that’s what it was. Your planet was above.

RW: Was that a skylight?

JS: Yes, skylights. I still remember Pluto, Mercury, just…

RW: Stays with you?

JS: Yes. It was actually – I remember going as a translator many years later, and they had put up walls, and I said, “This is not good.?

RW: Very strange, huh?

JS: Yeah.

RW: Any other memories that really stick out for you? Students or events?

JS: We always had the sing in. We always – and the diversity of the school, the one common characteristic was – I tell people, it was just like my own upbringing. I’m one of eight children. I tell people, I didn’t realize that some people considered us poo. And people look at me, and I said “We are so poor, we couldn’t afford an r at the end of poor.”

So these children – and that was one of the things Milt did, we always made sure the students had breakfast, lunch, had a snack. And to be honest with you, one of the hardest things for me when I became principal? Some of these young people didn’t want to go home. Because they had stability at school. And the scariest thing to me, and I’ve said it forever, one of the scary things for me was that I was one of the most stable adults that these kids ever dealt with, especially as a male. And I said, that’s pretty sad. I'll give you an example. We used to deal with situations that would literally curl people’s hair. And one of them was, when I was first sent over as principal, because they had closed Lorin Farr. That was the first time that I lived in Ogden that they actually had formal protests at the board meetings. Placards and parents were angry because they were closing the school and that those kids were going to have to go with *those* kids. Well, that school, in terms of being white versus ethnic minority, the largest percentage were Hispanic. And I mean a huge percentage. The fact that I spoke the language – and I have to tell you, one of the unique situations when I was told to be the principal – and I always say, send Sandoval. I’m a Vietnam veteran, so I’ve had a few experiences in my life. So I said, "How do you get these people together?" because there was anger. So I thought, "Well, I got to get these people together, show they're not so different." So I sent mailers to all the parents from both areas, and I said, we’re having a picnic at Dee School, told them the date, and it was a watermelon bash. We sat down and we had watermelon and people got to talk, and pretty soon it was fine. And the unique thing about that is, they used to compare, they used to rank schools on their test scores. And the staff from Dee and Jefferson always used to kind of shudder to see who was going to be in last place. And so when I took over, first of all, I told all my teachers, "You don’ teach the test, but you teach the skills. Every kid needs to know the skills expected to do well." We went from – it used to be called the California Test of Basic Skills – to the SAT. Well, what I did was I had my teachers, all of them, I said, "I want you to document, graph, and chart the kids that we had for at least six months. What was their pre-test score and what was their post-test score and what was their growth?" Because the complaint was “you don’t have those kids on the national norms.” And I said, "These kids, they have one member of the family if they’re lucky, or they're living with somebody else." But I was going to tell you about the situation I had to deal with that just about . . . if I could have caught this fellow, I probably would have gone to jail. I had three sisters. One was in second, one was in fourth, one was in fifth. When they were administering the tests, these young ladies were just . . . it’s hard to describe. They were very animated, very depressed, very, just up and down, up and down. So, I talked to them. What had happened is that the mom was living with a fellow, and he had raped the three girls. And I was so angry, and I said "And yet, there are people that believe that the measurement of success is how well the kids did on a test." The fact that these girls are still alive and that they’re going to have to live with that . . . So at least we got them some help. Those are the kinds of things that, when you go into education, the last thing in the world that you're expecting. You’re expecting to teach. And some of us, some members of society think we teach, and then when we quit teaching, they put us in the closet till the next day. And we’re human, and we live in the community, and we did. And so as much as possible, we’d try to get these young people to – let me give you another example. When Cathy and I were allowed to team teach, I had been told by Milt Kendrick – because I had been hired as the assistant director of the bilingual program – one day I’m looking for Cathy, and he says, “Mr. Sandoval, I’d like you to apply for the sixth grade opening. It’s the toughest group to come through here, nobody seems to be getting to them.” So I said, “Wait a minute, you say I can still apply?” He says, “Yeah.” So I call my supervisor, and I say I’ve been given a challenge, I’d like to apply for the job, is that okay? So I did, and I actually got it. So we spent the first five days talking to these young people about our own background. We were born and raised in New Mexico, one of eight children, mom and dad both went to the eighth grade. No, we weren’t Mormons. And we’re not going to put up with “poor me” and I say, “No. You put forth the effort, and we’ll do everything humanly possible to help you out.” To this day, I have some of those young people on Facebook and – I don’t say that because I’m patting myself on the back, I’m saying I taught a lot of young people, but I hope what I taught them more than anything is that they were important. And with that, they can do anything. I attribute much of that to my, to my training and background, my own training in my home. But part of it was the training that we got at Dee: the team, the belief in family, and, like I said, I give a lot to Milt.

RW: That’s great.

JS: He was a fine gentleman. Sad thing to me is that he didn’t live very long. I believe he retired, but he didn’t live very long. And we got to know his family, got to know all of his family and the kids.

RW: Was he from Ogden originally, do you know?

JS: Yes, he was. But like I said, my own daughter went to Dee School. I tell people, if I believed my daughter can benefit from that program, what do you think I think about the other kids? Poor girl. I was her high school principal for four years. I had four children and I gave three of them their diploma. My daughter was a student and I gave it to her. Then this little guy [pointing], I snuck up on the stage and gave it to him. And then my son and one of his friends who lived with me his senior year. I was able to give them their diploma. The only one I didn’t was my youngest daughter, who would sneak up there by then. When they had the celebration before they knocked it down? My daughter was there. She has, probably, the best pictures of the activity. I could probably give you her name. She’s got, she put it on Facebook the other day.

RW: And what is her name?

JS: Her name is Maria, middle initial E., Sandoval. I can give you her number and you can tell her Dad gave it to you. She and some of her classmates and other students attended the festivities.

RW: That’s great. That’s great.

JS: And she’s very close.

RW: I’ll get the number after we turn off the recorder. Is there anything else you’d like to add?

JS: Again, as an educator, we may not have taught these students all of the skills academically that they, they probably needed. But we taught them, and a lot of it had to do with the sing-ins, the activities we did, as we taught them how to be fine human beings. And, that, to me, is, probably as important or more than their academic skills. And many of these young people have done well.

RW: Good.

JS: And I have to tell you about Pates. Those set of twins, the oldest is a daughter, and I got to know the Mom pretty well, because I used to have to go over and visit her. We used to make home visits, and, even as a teacher, that was a thing that I think made us unique. I told my students that I was giving them one week to notify their moms, dads, whomever significant others, that I wanted them to come to the school and meet me. And I said, if after a week they have not, I will come and visit them. So, I met all of my students, as a teacher, and of course, I dealt with many of them. The worst time to deal with the parents is when there is a problem.

RW: You get ahead of that.

JS: Once people know that you’re approachable, and I’ll give you an example, and it carried over. When I became principal of Ogden High School – I’m not from Utah, certainly not from Ogden, so I didn’t know the histories, some of the other things. I said, “I’ve got to get the parents on my side.” So I went to all of the churches, all of the denominations in the area, and I asked their pastor, preacher, whomever, “I’d like to address your congregation. I’m the new principal at Ogden, here’s my phone number, I don’t want you to wait.” I said, “You can call and we’ll give you the latest attendance, we’ll give you the credit, we’ll give you . . .” [phone rings] That’s Cathy.

RW: Okay, we just had to pause there while the phone rang, but we’re now recording again.

JS: Anyways, as I was indicating, that carried over where your parents were every bit as important as your students because – and when I say parents, whomever was responsible for them. Because it’s a partnership. And, if your first experience with parents is when their child has done something not acceptable? It’s not pretty. At least they get to see that other side. I did share with you one – when I was at Ogden, some of my staff were complaining. “Why do we have back-to-school night? We don’t have the parents that we want here. Spanish-speaking parents don’t show up.” And I said, “Do you speak Spanish?” They said no. And I said, “They don’t speak English either.” So I went on the radio station, asked for volunteers, told the parents to come, told them that we would have people that would speak Spanish. But I observed one of the teachers that was having a conference. The parent had the student because the parent didn’t speak English. So the teacher is telling the mom, “You know, your son is a fine young man but he never turns in his homework. He shows up every day but doesn’t turn in his homework.” The mom’s looking at the boy, and it just so happened that the boy says, “Mom, the teacher is telling you I’m one of the best students in class.” And I said, “Excuse me, saying, yeah, you’re a fine young man, but you’re not turning in your assignments.” So the mother turned, and I said, “Ma’am, we can get you” – we call it, the students call them turkey sheets, where we would send all of the classes that they had, and the teacher’s name, and the teacher would write their behavior, what their grade was, and what their homework was. I used to tell the parents, when they, not if, when they bring that form home on Friday, you’ve already made arrangements with them on Monday, that if they come home with a positive, you don’t have to buy them a motorcycle or a car, but they can go to the movie. You’re going to give them a reward. And if they don’t, your’re going to give them a consequence.

RW: What did they call them?

JS: Turkey sheets. Because it’s a real turkey. And many of the parents appreciated that because they were getting feedback. I’d tell the parents, if you’re not getting it Friday, call me because I don’t want you to blame them. Maybe they didn’t bring it because it was a bad report. Teacher might have held on to them. Teacher might not have been there, last period teacher. So I said check first before we throw rocks.

As teachers at Dee, we were expected to make home visits. We were expected. We didn’t allow or we didn’t sit in our classrooms waiting for the parents to show up. If they didn’t – I do have to tell you, my one – this young lady – I just could not get the parent to show up. So I finally told her, you know what? I’m done. I’ve sent notes, I’ve called. I haven’t gotten a response. She was very embarrassed. She said, “Mr. Sandoval, she can’t come because she works.” And I said, “No problem. I’ll see her when she works.” She worked at the Berthana. She was a dancer. That was when they wore pasties. So I’m sitting at the table, talking to this Mom, as she’s half-clothed.

RW: Boy, that’s, uh…

JS: You can’t make that up.

RW: Making eye contact is very important.

JS: Yeah, you can’t make that up. But, nevertheless, that was her employment.

I loved education, I spent almost thirty years in it, and if it had not been for my experience at Dee, I would not have been an educator.

RW: So it definitely influenced your life, as with so many other people, I’m learning.

JS: I had been accepted to the University of Utah law school. I had a law firm in Ogden that was going to sponsor me.

RW: It’s been great, Jim. Thank you so much for sharing your memories with us.

JS: I will tell Cathy, because I think – [I’ll] at least give her your number. I call her my younger sister. She is my younger sister, but she finished school a year before I did, and people say, “Why?” and I say, “Yeah, yeah, yeah.” She’s the one that retired as superintendent. So we both started as interns and both retired as the director of student services. Not bad for a couple of kids from New Mexico.

RW: Did pretty well for yourselves.

JS: Any other questions?

RW: I think that’s it. Thank you so much!